



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

# Department of Human Services

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Department of Human Services

Donald L. Carcieri, Governor

## DIVISION OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

### Annual Report to the General Assembly

Fiscal Years 2005 & 2006



Prepared by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
on behalf of the Department of Human Services

# The RI Department of Human Services

## Division of Veterans Affairs

### Overview

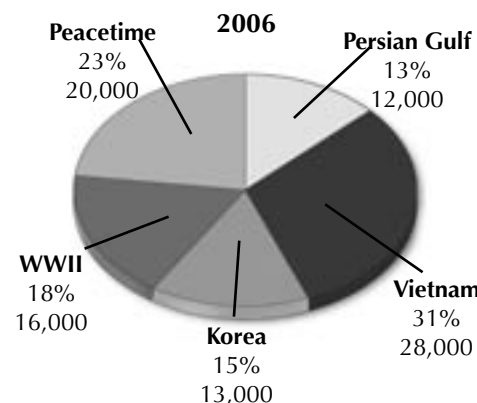
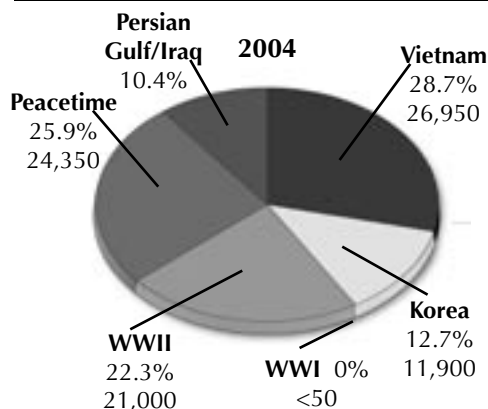
Operated and administered by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, the Division of Veterans Affairs provides a wide range of benefits to Rhode Island veterans and their dependants. A comprehensive program of social, medical and rehabilitative services, as well as a broad range of casework services and burial services are provided by the Division, which is comprised of the Rhode Island Veterans Home, the Rhode Island Veterans Affairs Office, and Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery.

The Division offers veterans-related assistance to the state's 89,000 veterans, and their dependants. Nearly eighty percent of Rhode Island's veterans, or over 69,000 individuals, served our country during a wartime period, making them eligible to receive the full range of health care services offered by the Rhode Island Veterans Home, burial services at the Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery and additional services offered through the Veterans Affairs Office.

In FY '06, of the 69,000 War Veterans eligible for services, 16,000 were World War II Veterans and another 13,000 were veterans of the Korean War with current average ages of 80+ and 70+ years, respectively. The Division expects that as these groups age there will be additional demands for services in all areas.

The following chart uses updated figures compiled, in 2005, by the US Department of Veterans Affairs to categorize veterans in Rhode Island by war service. We have

### RI Veterans by War Services



included a chart from FY '04 for comparison purposes. There has been some movement in the numbers for FY '05/FY '06, as shown, with a slight increase in the number of Persian Gulf/Iraq, Korean and Vietnam era veterans and a decrease in the number of WWII veterans.

### Overall Employment & Operating Budgets

The Division of Veterans Affairs as a whole employed 260 individuals and had an operating budget in FY '05 of \$22,400,000. For FY '06, employment averaged 258 and the Division's overall budget totaled \$23,400,000. In both years, approximately ninety-percent of the Division's budget was spent at the Veterans Home. The remaining funds were utilized by the Veterans Affairs Office and the Veterans Cemetery combined.

The charts below will show the breakdown of resources funding the Division

of Veterans Affairs for FY '05 and FY '06.

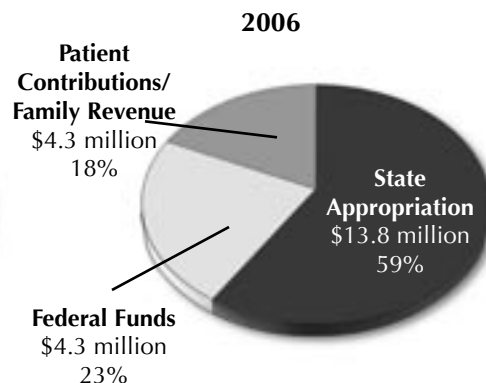
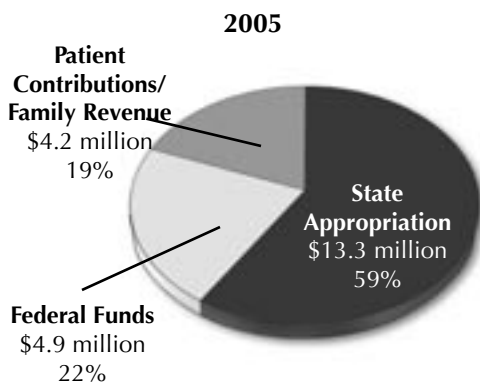
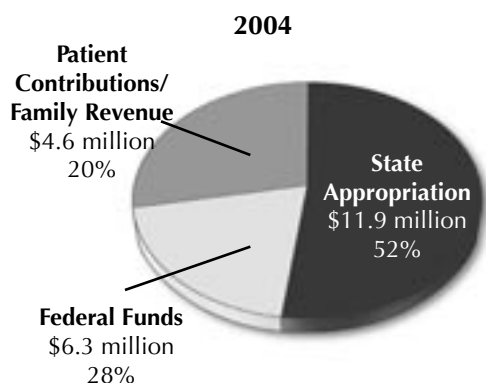
### Looking Ahead

The Division of Veterans Affairs faces a growing challenge resulting from the aging of the state's veteran population from World War II and the Korean War. As a result, more services including long term care provided by the Veterans Home (over half of the total veterans population in Rhode Island is over 60 years of age) will be required.

Another challenge will be continuing to meet the needs of an increasing number of veterans in the state resulting from deployments to the Gulf War, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

As a result of the sharp increase in elder veterans and the increased demand for services, the Rhode Island Veterans Home and the Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery expects a growing need for both beds and interments. In addition, the Rhode

### Veterans Affairs FY Resources



Island Veterans Home is likely to continue to experience moderate waiting lists for nursing facility level of care placements, especially

Alzheimers/Dementia placements. Similarly, the number of interments will continue to increase thus causing a corresponding

increase in Cemetery Maintenance and Perpetual Care.

## The Rhode Island Veterans Home

The Rhode Island Veterans Home is situated on a 110-acre campus located in Bristol, Rhode Island. The Veterans Home exists to provide quality nursing and domiciliary care to the veteran. A variety of social, medical, nursing and rehabilitative services are provided to eligible Rhode Island veterans, their survivors and/or dependants to help improve their physical, emotional and economic well-being. The Veterans Home admits war service veterans who have been honorably discharged and have resided in the state at least two consecutive years prior to admission and/or were inducted into the military service from the State.

The Home continues to operate the thirty-six (36) bed Special Needs Unit for those veterans who are coping with the effects of any number of dementia-related illnesses and conditions. This is a secure area that provides for quality nursing care in a safe and appropriate environment designed to accommodate the needs of veterans with these types of conditions.

Currently, the Special Needs Unit is full and there is a growing waiting list for these beds which is resulting in increased waiting times for admission. The continued need for skilled-level care remains high, and the demand for skilled care and special needs

care is projected to continue or increase in the future as the WWII, Korean and Vietnam Veterans age.

### Veterans Home Patient Services and Amenities

The Home is licensed and surveyed by the Rhode Island Department of Health and is also certified and monitored by the federal Department of Veterans Affairs. In addition to nursing and medical care provided to residents at the Rhode Island Veterans Home, the following specific services are also available:

- a fully-certified Alzheimer's Care Unit;
- a full complement of rehabilitation services;
- activities therapy;
- on-site dental, x-ray and pharmacy services;
- transportation to and from Veterans Administration Hospital; and
- social work, chaplaincy and volunteer services.

There is a library on campus, as well as a gift shop, a bank, a barber shop and a beautician. Religious services for all denominations are provided and many activities, including movies, crafts, card games, bingo and cookouts take place

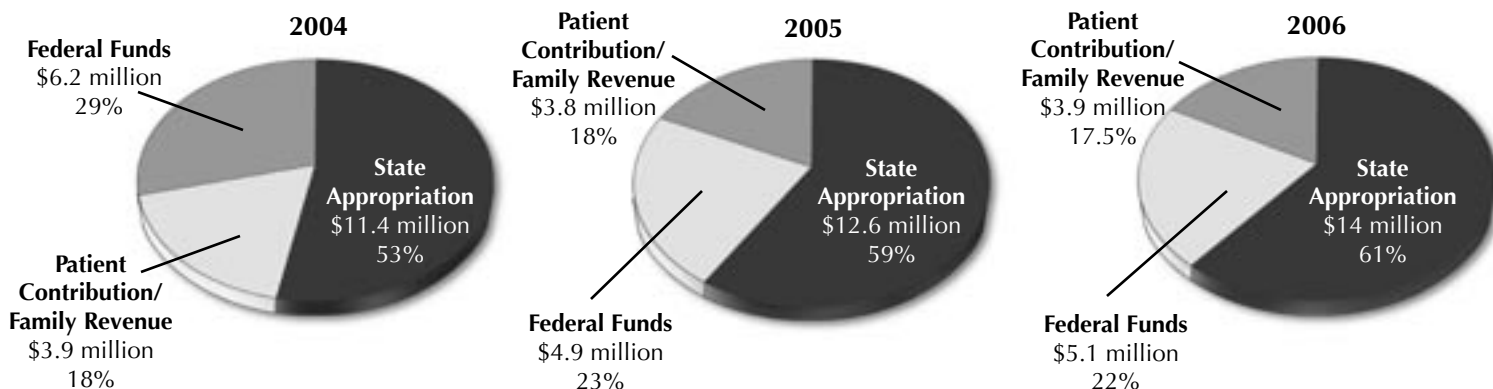
regularly for the enjoyment of the residents. The Home has a very active Family Council, as well as a Resident Council, which meet regularly to discuss concerns and issues affecting residents. The Family Council exists as an advocacy group on behalf of residents of the Home and their families and also serves as an advisory body to the Veterans Advisory Council on matters concerning the Home and involving the legislature.

The Veterans Advisory Council, which was created to advise the Department of Human Services on matters relating to Veterans Home rules, policies and regulations, continues to meet and provide ongoing service to the Division and veterans in the state. The Council has dedicated itself to improving the lives and well being of Rhode Island veterans by enhancing the services and programs available to them.

The average number of nursing care beds and domiciliary care beds utilized at the Veterans Home in FY '05 was approximately 216 and 30, respectively. In FY '06, those numbers rose to 221 for nursing care beds and 33 for domiciliary care.

The Home employed 246 individuals and had an operating budget of \$21.3 million for FY '05. In FY '06, employment remained the same, and the operating budget grew to

### Veterans Home FY Resources



\$23 million. For both years, well over half of the Home's operating budget was derived from state appropriations. A combination of Federal funding and patient contribution/family revenue funded the balance. The charts on the previous page show the funding split in detail.

### **The Veterans Transitional Supportive Program (VTSP)**

The Veterans Home also operates the Veterans Transitional Supportive Program (VTSP) out of its Bristol location. The VTSP is a collaborative effort by the Rhode Island Veterans Home and the US Department of Veterans Affairs to assist homeless veterans in their return to community living. The mission of the VTSP is to provide the necessary combination of services, including substance abuse treatment, work therapy, individual counseling, medical and psychiatric treatment, education and training, and more, to homeless veterans and those at risk for homelessness so that they can function independently. Each veteran is expected to develop an individualized treatment plan and work with a case manager to resolve issues contributing to their homelessness.

Throughout FY '05, 229 homeless veterans received services through the VTSP, including 33 veterans enrolled in the residential VTSP program. The average length of stay for discharged residents was 237 days. In FY '06, 186 veterans received services, including 29 enrolled in its residential program. Average length of stay for FY '06 was 233 days.

## **Rhode Island Veterans Home**

### **Program Objectives**

- Continue to maintain quality patient care services to resident veterans.
- Improve the In-Service Training Program by increasing the educational training offered.
- Continue to expand the Quality Improvement Plan and Quality Assurance Goals.
- Compliance with both the VA State Home Survey Standards and the Department of Health Standards.

### **Program Indicators**

- Ongoing Internal Quality Assurance Studies and Monitoring Devices such as: Foley Catheter monitoring, Universal Precautions and Measures of Performance, Resident Falls, Pain Management, Abuse & Neglect, Mood Monitoring, Nutrition and Weight Loss, Pressure Sore Management and Drug Reduction, Admission Policies (28 Indicators monitored), In-House resident transfers, Fire Drill Monitors, MDS CQI Checklist, and Ice Machines.
- Continue to support both the Family Council and the Resident Council by assisting them in their missions wherever possible.
- Successful surveys by the Rhode Island Department of Health, Department of Veterans Affairs, OSHA and any other regulatory agency governing the function and maintenance of nursing homes.

## **Veterans Transitional Support Program**

### **Program Objectives**

- Improve the success of the Veterans Transitional Support Program (VTSP) Quality Improvement Plan. The VTSP is required to adopt national outcome monitors by the Northeast Program Evaluation Center (NEPEC). Critical monitors of program performance include structural measures, patient characteristics, process measures and outcome measures.

### **Program Indicators and Data**

- Reduction in alcohol related problems of veterans treated from their point of entry into residential treatment to the time of discharge.
- Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist assigned to the program completed vocational assessments of all homeless veterans within 30 days of admission.
- 86% of all homeless veterans in the VTSP successfully located permanent housing upon completion of residential treatment in FY '05. In FY '06, that number rose to 88%.
- In FY '05, 55% of all discharged veterans either obtained employment or were awarded permanent disabilities from Social Security or the Veterans Administration. Fifteen Veterans were awarded pension benefits and 6 veterans returned to work. For FY '06, this data is no longer a performance measure.

# **The Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery**

### **Overview**

The DHS Division of Veterans Affairs maintains a dignified and solemn military cemetery which provides a final resting place for Rhode Island Veterans who have served their country honorably during wartime, as well as their spouses and dependants. The Veterans Cemetery provides burial memorial services, and maintains buildings and grounds covering its 338-acre campus in the Town of Exeter.

The campus acreage was expanded just this past May by 73.6 acres as a result of a land transfer between the Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals, which owned the land as part of the former Ladd School, and the Department of Human Services, which oversees the Division of Veterans Affairs and operations of the cemetery. The land will provide the cemetery with a buffer zone between it and surrounding properties and will afford the cemetery the

opportunity to expand as future demand warrants. Governor Carcieri noted in a press release on the transfer, that "we must protect the surrounding area and ensure this will be a serene, peaceful setting for generations to come." The state's veterans community played an important role, along with former DHS Director Ronald Lebel, in bringing the transfer to fruition.

Eligibility for burial at the Veterans Cemetery was expanded in '04 and has

since included active service personnel with honorable discharges and at least two years of service as well as twenty-year retirees of the Rhode Island National Guard. Veterans are interred at the cemetery at no cost to the veteran and/or their family members.

Committals are conducted with military honors and memorial services are provided at the cemetery as well. The buildings, including a Memorial Chapel, and a Committal Building and Columbarium Area, and grounds of the cemetery are carefully maintained. Maintaining the cemetery's dignified presence and enhancing cemetery related services are shared goals of the Division of Veterans Affairs, the state's veteran community and a number of veterans' organizations.

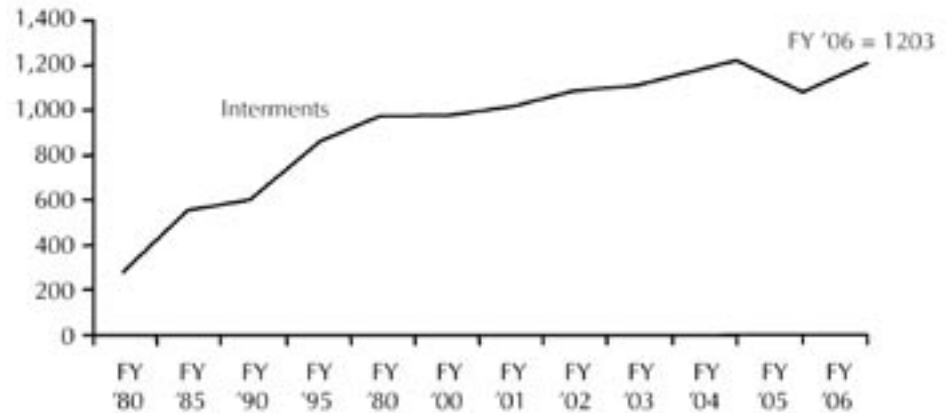
These organizations have worked hard to raise private funds resulting in the installation of a number of important and significant war monuments on the grounds over the past several years including the Korean War Memorial; the RI Women's Veterans Memorial; the Armenian-American Monument; and, the World War II Submarine Memorial. Altogether, nearly thirty monuments and memorials dedicated to veterans of specific wars and conflicts have been erected on the cemetery grounds including the most recent addition to the cemetery grounds, a monument the Freemasons dedicated in April, 2006.

Memorial Day Ceremonies are conducted each year at the Veterans Cemetery in honor of deceased veterans who selflessly served their state and country.

### Interment Utilization

Approximately 22,601 interment sites have

## RI Veterans Memorial Cemetery Interments 1980 to 2006



been utilized at the Cemetery, covering approximately 100 of the campus 338 acres. While the Veterans Cemetery's Master Plan proposes an increase in interment capacity to 72,500, the current capacity stands at approximately 43,000 sites, including niches. The annual interment average, for the period of the last several years, is approximately 1,100. Actual interment numbers for FY '05 and FY '06 were 1,168 and 1,203 respectively. Based on the current utilization, it is projected that sufficient gravesites/niches will be available for eligible veterans and dependants through the first quarter of this century.

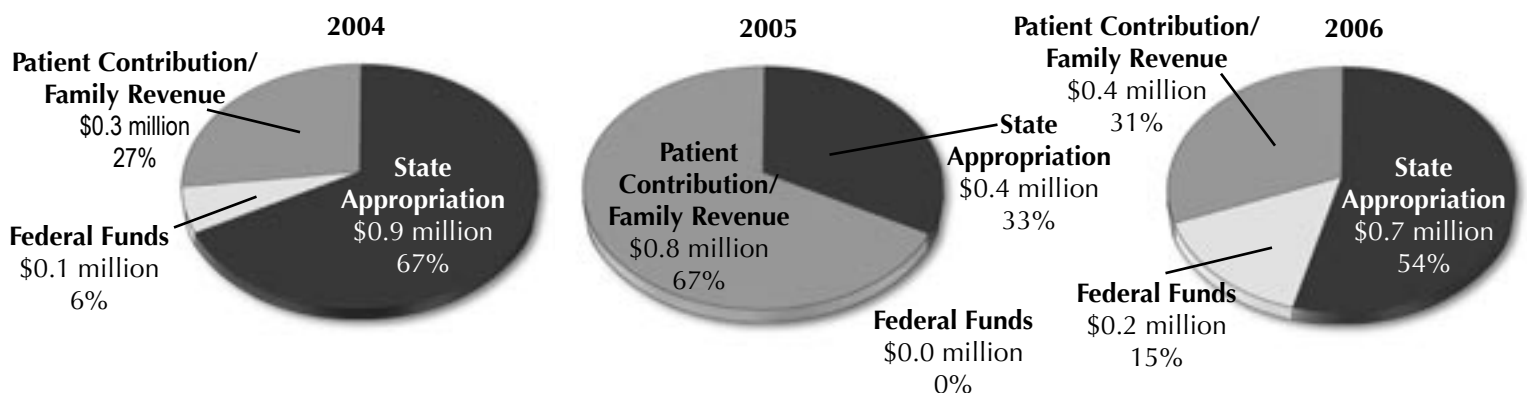
The Division of Veterans Affairs has continued to project an increased demand for burial services in the next several years due to the aging of a World War II and Korean War veterans and their dependants. This growth will lead to an increase in the amount of acreage requiring perpetual care by cemetery staff and the number of monthly interments

occurring. Meanwhile, due to an increase in eligible veterans choosing cremation, the cemetery opened its first Columbarium area (2002), which will curtail, to some extent, the number of in-ground cremation interments, thus saving acreage for full interments. In fact, since the Columbarium opened, 889 cremains have been interred. In calendar year 2006, which includes portions of FY '05 and FY '06, 273 niches were utilized.

The Veterans Memorial Cemetery is pleased to have been recently ranked, out of 63 state veterans cemeteries throughout the country, as the fourth most utilized, behind Tennessee, New Jersey and Maryland.

The Veterans Cemetery employed 12 individuals in FY '05 and 14 in FY '06. Its operating budgets for the two fiscal years, FY '05 and FY '06 respectively, were \$1.1 million and \$1.3 million. The following charts below will show the resource breakdown funding the cemetery budget.

## RI Veterans Memorial Cemetery FY 2004 Resources



## Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery

### Program Objectives

- Continue the ongoing beautification and memorialization program with the support and assistance of Rhode Island-based Veterans Service Organizations and the R.I. Advisory Council to Veterans Affairs.
- Continue to reduce waiting times for Interment Services through the use of the new Committal Building and Columbarium area for those veterans who have chosen cremation as their interment alternative (this has been built primarily with Federal funds allocated by the National Cemeteries Service).
- Continue to meet the needs of all Rhode Island's eligible veterans and their families, for increased interments and increased perpetual care of all interment sites and monuments.
- Proceed to implement Master Plan for future development and design for the cemetery. The Master Plan, which was submitted to the US Department of

Veterans Affairs in the Fall of 2004, includes planned new roadways, a new front entrance and a new administration building as a minimal plan for development.

### Program Indicators

- Number of interments (according to War Service Era, Reserve/National Guard status), cremation interments and Eligible Dependents.
- Length of time funeral processions must wait for Chapel Ceremony.

## Veterans Affairs/Veterans Assistance

The Veterans Affairs/Assistance Program works with social, medical and rehabilitative staff within the Division and with outside agencies to assist Rhode Island Veterans and their families in accessing qualified state and federal program benefits and services.

The Office of Veterans Affairs continues to offer a wide range of social services including casework, counseling, referral, budget management, family relations, health care, and technical assistance in completion of claims for veterans (pensions, compensation, Social Security). Other direct assistance includes home visits to veterans applying for admissions to the Rhode Island Veterans Home.

The Veterans Affairs Divisional Office is located in a more central area within the state (Pastore Center, Cranston) compared to its former Bristol location. This location has enabled the Veterans Affairs staff to gain greater access to this state's veteran population and other related programs and has afforded the Division the opportunity to become more involved in other statewide programs that provide services to veterans. The Veterans Affairs Office now has available for consultation, a Women's Veterans

Coordinator who serves on a volunteer basis. This individual will be available to specifically assist women who may feel a need or preference to share their issues with a fellow female veteran.

State legislation enacted in FY '98 created the Persian Gulf Relief and Information Commission. The Commission was expanded from seven to nine members during the 2006 session of the General Assembly. The Office of Veterans Affairs has become the repository of all information gained through the activities of this Commission. At present, the Commission continues to create a Gulf War Registry of Rhode Island Veterans who served in the Persian Gulf War.

### Program Objectives

- Continue to do all intake casework in preparation for application and acceptance to the Rhode Island Veterans Home.
- Maintain a statistical database of all information gathered and processed by the Persian Gulf War Relief and Information Commission.
- Improve coordination of all pertinent information that might affect veterans of this State, through sharing information from both the U.S. Dept. of Veterans

Affairs and/or any State chartered veterans service organization.

- Develop an improved system by which Veteran public service information can be disseminated through the various media sources.
- Become a partner with all public and private agencies that serve veterans in an effort to educate both the service workers and the veteran as to what benefits and health care systems are available to them and how to access these benefits.
- Assist with demobilization of Rhode Island National Guard units returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) with re-entry into civilian life.

### Statutory History

Title 30, Chapter 24, Sections 1 and 2 established the Rhode Island Veterans' Home.

Title 30, Chapter 17 created the Veterans Affairs/Assistance Program.

Title 30, Chapter 25, Section 14 authorized the operation of the Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery.